

Message Text

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EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, PGOV, MOPS, CB, US

SUBJECT: EXCHANGE WITH PAN SOTHI ON CURRENT POLITICAL/MILITARY
SITUATION

1. FIRST DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER PAN SOTHI CALLED ON ME FEB. 3. HE WAS MANDATED BY STEERING COMMITTEE OF SOCIO-REPUBLICAN PARTY TO OBTAIN MY ASSESSMENT OF THE MILITARY SITUATION IN THE KHMER REPUBLIC, WHETHER FANK C-IN-C SOSTHENE FERNANDEZ IS DOING A GOOD JOB, PROSPECTS FOR KEEPING NAVIGATION ON THE MEKONG OPEN, POSSIBILITY OF A US AIRLIFT INTO PHNOM PENH IN THE EVENT MEKONG IS CLOSED, AND WHAT, IF ANYTHING, GKR CAN DO TO BRING ABOUT AN EARLY POLITICAL SOLUTION TO THE KHMER DRAMA.

2. PAN SOTHI SEEMED WELL-INFORMED ABOUT THE NUMERICAL WEAKNESS OF THE SEVENTH DIVISION HOLDING THE NORTHWESTERN FLANK. HE ALSO CLAIMED THAT SEVENTH DIVISION COMMANDER GENERAL DENG LAYOM WAS NOT POPULAR WITH THE KHMER KROM ELEMENTS WHICH MAKE UP BULK OF THAT DIVISION. I AGREED WITH BOTH OF THESE EVALUATIONS AND STRESSED IMPORTANCE OF BRINGING RECRUITS INTO THE SEVENTH DIVISION AS BEST WAY TO SHORE UP NORTHWESTERN FLANK. AS FOR REPLACEMENT FOR GENERAL DENG LAYOM, I OPINED THAT MOST GOOD KHMER KROM COMMANDERS ARE ALREADY FULLY UTILIZED BUT PROMISED TO LOOK INTO THIS MATTER.

3. AS FOR THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE KHMER GENERAL STAFF
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(EMG) AND ITS CHIEF, SOSTHENE FERNANDEZ, I THOUGHT THAT

THEY WERE DOING AS GOOD A JOB AS COULD BE EXPECTED. CERTAINLY THE SUCCESS IN THE FIRST ROUND OF FIGHTING IN EARLY JANUARY WAS TO A LARGE EXTENT THE RESULT OF EMG'S ABILITY TO JUGGLE BRIGADES AROUND, GRING IN REINFORCEMENTS FROM THE PROVINCES, BORROW ARMORED SQUADRONS FROM OTHER UNITS TO MEET EMERGENCIES, COORDINATE AIR STRIKES WITH GROUND MOVEMENTS, ETC. I THEREFORE DISCOURAGED IDEA OF A CHANGE IN FANK LEADERSHIP AT THIS TIME. (I KNOW FROM OTHER REPORTING THAT THE SOCIO-REPUBLICAN PARTY WAS PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN GETTING MY VIEW ON THIS MATTER SINCE THEY WISH TO REPLACE SOSTHENE WITH SAK SUTSAKHAN.)

4. ON KC EFFORTS TO CLOSE THE MEKONG, I WAS SOMEWHAT MORE OPTIMISTIC IN MY ORAL ASSESSMENT THAT THE EVENTS OF THE DAY WOULD JUSTIFY, BUT I DID NOT WISH TO HAVE MY REMARKS TRIGGER AN AIR OF PESSIMISM AND GLOOM AMONG THE PHNOM PENH ELITE. I SAID THAT I HAD HOPES WAYS WILL BE FOUND TO KEEP THE MEKONG OPEN AND THEREBY CONTINUE GETTING AMMUNITION AND RICE INTO THE CAPITAL.

5. IN THIS CONNECTION I SAID THAT IN MY OPINION 1975 WAS NOT THE TIME FOR A BERLIN AIRLIFT-TYPE OF OPERATION BY THE US AIR FORCE INTO PHNOM PENH. THE KHMER MUST REALIZE THIS AND ACT ACCORDINGLY. THIS MEANS MAKING THE NECESSARY SACRIFICES TO ASSURE THAT THE MEKONG REMAINS OPEN TO NAVIGATION.

6. AS FOR STEPS THE GKR MIGHT TAKE TO FACILITATE A POLITICAL SOLUTION, PAN SOTHIE ASKED WHETHER THE MARSHAL'S WITHDRAWAL FROM THE POLITICAL SCENE WOULD BRING ABOUT AN EARLY CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES AND NEGOTIATIONS. I REPLIED THAT WE HAVE NO FIRM INDICATION THAT A UNILATERAL ACT BY THE MARSHAL WOULD IN TURN LEAD TO A WILLINGNESS BY THE OTHER SIDE TO NEGOTIATE A POLITICAL SOLUTION OR A CEASEFIRE. I QUITE FRANKLY SAID THAT IT WAS MY IMPRESSION THAT THE MARSHAL WOULD NOT MIND STEPPING DOWN IF HE WERE SURE THAT THIS ACT BY ITSELF WOULD LEAD TO A POLITICAL SOLUTION. PAN SOTHI AGREED WITH THIS ANALYSIS. HE SAID IF THE MARSHAL

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GOES, THE OTHER SIDE SHOULD GIVE SOMETHING IN RETURN. IT WAS CLEAR, HOWEVER, FROM PAN SOTHIS REMARKS THAT MANY MEMBERS OF THE SOCIO-REPUBLICAN PARTY WOULD BRING THEIR INFLUENCE TO BEAR ON THE MARSHAL TO STEP DOWN BEFORE ANY TALKS WERE HELD, IF THIS ACT BY ITSELF WOULD FACILITATE THE START OF A DIALOGUE LEADING TO A POLITICAL SOLUTION.
DEAN

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